



The Authors Publish

GUIDE TO

MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

Second
Edition

Emily
Harstone

*The
Authors Publish
Guide to
Manuscript
Submission*

Second Edition

Emily Harstone

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Introduction

I feel a great surge of adrenaline when I finish the first draft of a novel. When I was younger, I would enjoy the thrill of completion for days. Then, I would start a new project.

It should surprise no one that my early efforts were not published. Honestly, I never even got around to submitting them to publishers (thank goodness).

Now that I am older and wiser, I know that the first draft is just that—a draft. This book, *The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submission*, will walk you through how to turn a manuscript into a book.

The majority of this book focuses on the entire submission process from query letters to agents and publishers who accept direct

submissions. This book should answer all of the questions you have about manuscript submission, as well as some of the questions you didn't know you had.

We cover issues that trip up a lot of new authors including self-publishing, vanity publishers, copyright, and the importance of patience.

For a long time, submitting seemed strange and mysterious to me. It seemed too overwhelming to actually do. In fact, for the most part, submitting is relatively easy. This book will demystify it for you.

This is the second edition of *The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submissions*. Some of the sections of the book have been updated to reflect changes in the publishing world.

The bulk of the new information this book contains has to do with more detailed information about agents and pitches.

Over 5,000 words worth of content have been added to this book to make it better and more thorough. Some of the additions came based on the generous feedback we received about the first edition of the book.

This book is intended, in part, to be a companion to [*The 2018 Guide to Manuscript Publishers*](#). It's a book we update yearly, with reviews of over a hundred publishers that are open to unsolicited submissions.

We cover a few of those publishers in this book, but to get the bulk of the reviews, you would have to read [*The 2018 Guide to Manuscript Publishers*](#). You can also search our manuscript publisher reviews [online here](#).

Between [*The 2018 Guide to Manuscript Publishers*](#) and this book, you should learn everything you need to turn your manuscript into a published book.

Chapter 1:

Manuscript Preparation

This chapter is just an overview. Deep revisions take time, effort, and persistence. Different manuscripts require different amounts of revision. But if you follow the steps below, you will end up facing the right direction.

When you write a book, it is officially called a manuscript until it is published. One of the tricky things about writing is that it can be very hard to discern when a manuscript is actually finished and ready to be submitted to an agent. This, too, is the case if your book is self-published.

Some authors constantly tweak their work. Others finish one draft and declare it finished. I follow three steps to know that my

manuscript is done. Although, sometimes I repeat these steps, even after I start submitting.

Once I finish my first draft, and before I let anyone else see it, I edit it twice. The first draft of editing is just for spelling and grammatical errors. I often mess up my tense shifts, so I try to keep an eye on that. Everyone has different areas where they are more likely to make errors, so it is good to know your trouble spots and focus on them when editing.

During the second round of editing, I am more focused on the content. I want to make sure that the characters come across as authentic. I want to make sure the plot is interesting and doesn't have any gaping holes. I do not change anything significant at this point in terms of plot or character development, because I want feedback first. This is supposed to be the editing stage, and not the revising stage.

The second step is to find and organize a small group of readers. Try and choose at least five people whose opinions you trust, and

give them a copy of your manuscript. Do not expect feedback from all five, but handing out your manuscript to so many people will guarantee that you get at least some feedback.

If you want any feedback on specific elements of the manuscript, type up a list of questions for the reader to keep in mind. This will help them focus on giving you the feedback that you need.

Make sure that when they give you feedback you appreciate the compliments as well as take in the criticism. Read over all the feedback carefully and then let it set for a little bit. Don't do anything drastic to your book for at least two weeks.

The third step is editing and perhaps even revising the book; this is based on the feedback which you received. You don't have to take every nit-picky suggestion your readers made, but make sure to address any of the legitimate concerns they may have had. At this point in the process, I hire a professional editor to review all of my work for errors and to provide feedback on general plot points. If

you cannot afford to hire an editor, it is fine to proceed without one.

After this draft and one final review for any minor errors, your manuscript should be ready to submit. However, if you have an idea for a change in your plot or other revisions, and you have received a number of rejections, feel encouraged to revise your book again.

Don't let the fact that your manuscript is probably not 100% error free prevent you from submitting it. I often spot errors in New York Times Best Selling Novels. It is nearly impossible to be error-free, even with a professional editor. The hope with editing and revisions is to get your work to the point where errors don't distract from the plot and the plot is clear and easy to follow.

If you are struggling to get a book published and have submitted it to twenty or so publishers without any response, except for canned rejections (personal rejections are often a compliment and should

be seen as such), you should consider another major round of revisions.

If you are mostly querying with the first two to three chapters I suggest that you focus the revisions there. Most authors use those chapters as the “on ramp”, when they first writing the book they are orientating themselves to the world and the characters they are creating. It is their entry way into the world of the book, but it is not always helpful for, or even geared towards readers.

I have re-written the first three chapters of the last two novels I have written, always with positive results. Both times I changed something major that meant I had to make minor edits throughout the rest of the book for consistency. In one of them the event that became the first chapter had initially occurred before the book itself started, but it made so much more sense for readers to see that event as the first chapter, because it had lasting results, and it made that character a lot more relatable from the start, which made the book as a whole more appealing.

Don't be scared to make major revisions. You can always save old versions of your manuscript so you can switch back if you change your mind, or make an edit that doesn't work. Just make sure to title the document something that makes the version of the story it is, very clear.

Chapter 2:

An Overview of the Submission Process

Most publishers and agents want the same two things – a query letter and a synopsis. They also expect an excerpt of your book, generally the first two chapters although there is a lot of variation in terms of length. If it is a picture book they generally want the whole manuscript. Also, some publishers want the whole manuscript regardless of length. If it is non-fiction you are submitting, your manuscript does not even need to be complete and your proposal could just involve one sample chapter and an outline.

There are specific requirements that differ from publisher to publisher and from agency to agency, and also from genre to genre, however it is good to have a basic query letter and synopsis that you modify to meet the needs of the given agent or publisher. Just make sure you send the correct version to the right person. It really annoys a publisher to receive submissions with another publisher's name on it. The same goes for agents.

Make sure your sample chapters are perfectly polished and formatted. Some publishers want the full manuscript submitted from the start, so it is particularly important to do the formatting correctly. This article covers correct formatting (and the ways it is changing), in [detail](#).

You should spend a lot of time and consideration crafting the cover or query letter. This is the first impression you will make on agents and publishers. The next chapter focuses on how to compose a good cover letter and the chapter following it will focus on how to craft a good synopsis.

It is important note that many publishers expect information about your author platform or marketing plan. Don't know where to start

in terms of an author platform? Chapter 5 will cover that information in-depth.

If you meet a publisher or an agent directly at a conference, most want a pitch. A pitch can also be handy to include in your cover letter. Don't know what a pitch is? Chapter 4 talks about what a pitch is, and more importantly, how to make a good one. I always include my pitch in my cover letter.

Not all publishers and agents require a synopsis, but many do. Most want a complete synopsis of the plot that fits on one page. By complete synopsis, I mean they want spoilers. They also generally want information about character development. Chapter 6 will focus on how to craft a good synopsis.

It should go without saying, but it is very important edit and polish the query letter and synopsis. If you can afford an editor, get them to review the query letter, the synopsis, and also the first twenty pages. Twice. Or more. The first twenty pages of the novel are all

that most agents and many publishers will initially see, so make sure they are compelling and error free.

If you are focusing on finding an agent, then you should read this article: [The Safest Way to Search For an Agent](#). One of the best free reputable search engines for agents is [Agent Query](#). You can start looking for an agent there, but not all agents on that site are good agents. This is why additional research is often needed, but the details of what that research involves are covered in Chapter 8, Chapter 7 focuses on a basic overview of submitting to agents.

Chapter 9 takes into account information from authors, agents, and publishers, about common submission mistakes that lead to rejection. It is a must-read before you begin the submission process.

Once you have completed a query letter and a synopsis that you are happy with, start to research where you are going to submit your book. You can start your research earlier if you wish.

You should decide early on if you want to submit directly to publishers or if you want to submit to an agent. Chapter 10 covers the various pros and cons of both options.

If you are looking at submitting a manuscript directly to a publisher, our [index of manuscript publishers](#) is a good place to start. We always check watchdog sites before reviewing a publisher. But it is always good to verify the information yourself.

Remember, there is no such thing as a legitimate traditional publisher that charges its writers. You should be paid by your publisher, not the other way around.

When examining a publisher's website, [this article will help you know what to keep an eye out for](#).

Some publishers can respond to submissions within weeks, while others will respond within years; so, keep that in mind. If you have not heard from a publisher in six months, you should email them to ask about the status of the manuscript, unless they explicitly say they will take longer on their website.

Once you find agents or publishers that you feel would be a good fit, you should check and double check their submission guidelines.

Most publishers accept electronic submissions through email or a submission manager, but a few still require submissions through the post. Either way, the publisher's submission guidelines should walk you through the steps. The same goes for agents.

It is important not to submit to an agent or publisher if they say they are closed to unsolicited submissions. Your manuscript will not be read and in all likelihood, you will annoy the person or persons who receive it. This could hurt your chances in the future.

Chapter 3:

How to Write a Query

Letter

A query letter (sometimes referred to as a cover letter) is a single page letter introducing your book to an editor or a publisher that accepts unsolicited submissions.

When you write a query letter, always remember that it is similar to a cover letter in a job application. Be professional. Write in a formal style, even if that style is at odds with your novel. Make sure you repeatedly edit it for errors. Make sure it is typed and the font is easy to read. A standard font like Times New Roman works best.

Even though it is formal try to engage with the reader. Try to focus on what makes your book interesting and what sets it apart from other books.

I receive a lot of query letters for fiction manuscripts at Authors Publish (even though we don't publish fiction) and a lot of them are riddled with errors, and focus on a personal story involving financial obstacles. Publishers and agents don't want to struggle through reading an error filled manuscript, and hearing about personal obstacles you face is not going to change their opinion about publishing your manuscript.

Keep it short and sweet; don't use language that is too flowery. The query letter should consist of three main paragraphs: the hook, the mini synopsis, and the author's bio. If you particularly like an author that agent represents, or a book that publisher published, then it is appropriate to mention that in your letter.

I try to do a lot of research and personalize each letter at least a little. Most agents and publishers are used to receiving mass emails

that might not even reflect the genres they publish, so making it clear that you have done your research, puts your query letter ahead of the others.

In the first paragraph, you should also make the genre and the length of your manuscript clear.

Creating a Hook/Pitch

The hook or a pitch is a one sentence description of the book. It should be intelligent, intriguing, and concise.

Your hook should not be a rhetorical question.

An agent I knew handed me a small pile of query letters from authors that she rejected. Most of the letters she had not even bothered finishing to read. She asked me what they all had in common. By the third letter, it was clear they all started with rhetorical questions.

In one query letter, every paragraph was composed entirely of rhetorical questions.

It is best to focus on your hook, be it your main character, the location, or something else entirely. That is the best way to keep the sentence concise and maintain the agent's interest.

Also, make sure that the premise of your book sounds unique. Agents and publishers are unlikely to follow up with an author whose book appears to be generic. Including specifics helps make your manuscript stand out.

I go into more details about how to write a pitch in the next chapter. Wendy S. Delmater also offers great insight on to how to write a hook, which you can read [here](#).

Writing a Mini Synopsis That Appeals to Agents and Publishers

The mini synopsis is the second paragraph. It is difficult to describe a novel in a paragraph. The key is to just focus on giving the agent an impression of what your novel is like, without getting bogged down by all the details.

Reading the back flaps of books may really help you figure out the best way to convey the basics of your book to your prospective literary agent.

Writing an Appealing Author's Biography

The author's bio is not a necessary part of the query letter. If you have not been published before, or do not hold a degree in creative writing, it is probably best not to include an author's bio at all—unless your profession influences the subject of your books. For example, Kathy Reich's is a forensic scientist who writes novels about a forensic scientist who writes novels.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to your letter, you should do two things:

The first is to thank the agent or editor for their time and consideration. The second is to inform the agent that the full novel is available upon request.

Do not include the entire manuscript with the letter, but instead most agents request the first two or three chapters of your manuscript. When submitting non-fiction, you should include an outline, table of contents, and a few chapters for their consideration.

Once you have written your query letter, edit it repeatedly. Keep refining it, even after you have started to submit it to agents. Even more tips, in terms of query letters, are included in Chapter 9 so I encourage you to read that chapter as well before completing your query letter.

Chapter 4:

How to Write a Good Pitch

A "*Pitch*" (also known as a hook) was such a foreign term for me as a young author, that when the first agent asked for my novel's pitch at a conference, I blinked and shrugged. I was seventeen at the time so I suppose my reaction was understandable.

The agent then had to explain to me what a pitch was. How it is an attempt to make the main concept of your novel understandable and appealing in the space of one or two sentences.

I learned later that they could be longer than that, but the best pitches are simple. They are not just two long sentences with lots of complicated ideas. Ideally, they are simple, concise, and intriguing.

For example, the pitch for the movie *The Matrix* could be any of the following sentences:

If Neo swallows the Red Pill the fate of his captured world will be in his hands.

The whole world is captured, but intrepid rebels are trying to free it.

What you see is not real.

Just kiss Trinity.

Now some of those pitches are clearly better than others, some would only work if you had seen the movie, some might intrigue you enough to see the movie.

My first attempt at a pitch was a complete failure, but I have since successfully pitched an agent a novel, through the following methods.

Write a Lot of Pitches

This seems obvious, but it isn't necessarily. You should start writing pitches as often as possible if you are interested in following the path of publishing that involves agents. Even traditional publishers often require pitches, so if you are submitting to publishers directly it's not a bad thing to practice.

When you watch a movie, write a couple of pitches for it afterwards. Also sit down with your own novel and just write pitches for 15 minutes. Don't look at these pitches right away. Give it a few days then review them. Once you have done this a few times you should have three or four pitches that you like.

Play with Length

Try writing longer pitches occasionally and then think of ways that you can trim them down to size.

Play with Focus

A novel has a lot of different things going on at the same time. There can be many themes and plots. Don't try to cover all of it in the pitch. Instead try focusing on just one theme, plot, or character.

Compare

This sounds like a cheap trick but almost every agent I have ever met wants to compare your book to already successful books. For example, *50 Shades of Grey* is the erotic version of *Twilight*, but without Vampires. Agents want to know what your book is like, so saying something like "*The Matrix* with aliens, not robots" might intrigue someone.

Get Feedback

Take the few pitches you really like and then show them to people - friends and family members that you trust. Some should have read the novel already, others should not have. Their feedback will be valuable as you develop your ability to write a good pitch.

Chapter 5:

Building an Author Platform

This is an ongoing process, so feel encouraged to get started on this step long before your manuscript is finished. This chapter, unfortunately, cannot cover all the in's and outs of an author platform, because parts of it are personal and intuitive. Yet, it gives more of an overview of what it takes to get started.

An author platform is something more and more agents and publishers would like authors to already have. An author platform is essentially your “brand” – what makes you obviously you. This

is increasingly based primarily online, on social media, but it should include the real world as well.

If you have an established audience for your author platform and you already get lots of likes and shares online, maybe even some press outside of that, this is the type of information you include in your query letter. Otherwise, work on building your presence towards that.

Some publishers require that you include a link to at least one of your social platforms in your query letter, so if you have a meager number of likes or fans on that platform it could really count against you.

Increasingly, even large traditional publishers and agents want authors that already have to some degree of an audience and have previous experience promoting themselves. That is part of the reason the blog-to-book trend has continued to be so successful.

If you already have a significant social media presence, then this is a good thing, even if it is just with personal Facebook and

Instagram accounts. But do start more accounts on different platforms. It is also important to have a Goodreads account, to be part of a large community of readers and writers. It can also help to have accounts on other websites, such as Pinterest and Twitter.

Start broad with multiple platforms but focus on what works for you. Does a Facebook Author Page work better for you, or is it all about Instagram and hashtags? Figure these things out. It is important for me to keep my professional pages separate from my personal pages, but other authors feel differently. They add any readers or fans they have to their personal page.

It is important to know your limits and what you are comfortable with. I have written under a pen name for Authors Publish for four years — for a reason. I have made friendships through the pen name with readers, but I have also encountered some people who have made me feel less than safe. Use your judgment when sharing personal information, particularly pertaining to children and your location.

In person and online, focus on getting across your personality and information about the book you are writing or have written.

Readers who have not actually read your book will want to connect with something and personality can do that, so can sharing what you are interested in.

A blog, long seen as essential, is still a good idea. Although I think you can have more success by publishing articles on the blogs of other writers and established reading or writing focused websites. It might be more work to place pieces about writing on these sites, but since these places already have an audience, it can really pay off in terms of fans for your social media page and visitors for your website. Moreover, it does not require regular posting.

If you enjoy writing a blog, go for it. Make sure you link it to social media accounts so that anything you write there gets cross posted elsewhere. If you set up a Google Analytics account, then you can monitor how much use it is getting.

If having and maintaining a blog feels like a chore, I would suggest crafting longer, more detail oriented pieces, for other publications.

That way, you can build a relationship with other writers and editors, and if the publication is established it can lend your piece and your reputation more legitimacy.

Target places that have bios listed after articles because that can help you greatly increase your readership. The process of submitting articles has much lower consequences than the process of submitting books and is a lot less involved. It can help you improve your ability to craft a cover letter and converse with editors in an appropriate manner (generally via email).

In both online and offline platform building, it is very important to be professional to a certain degree—even when your personality is on display. Online this usually comes down to not making too many mistakes in spelling and grammar. Even if you are just writing a 140 character post, edit it as carefully as possible before posting it.

In person, behaving professionally hopefully means treating everyone you know with the consideration and dignity they deserve anyways.

In person, some of the ways you can build your platform (and that have worked for me) are giving readings (even if it is just one spot in an open mic), handing out business cards, being generous with the copies of the books I do have, buying other author's books, and getting my creative work published in various literary journals and anthologies.

There are other methods too. Attending writing conferences and workshops can be helpful, so can joining or starting a writing group. Submitting your work to local contests and contacting local radio stations and newspapers who might be interested in your work for any number of reasons.

Ultimately, in my experience, increasing one's author platform comes down to getting more involved in the literary community, one way or another. So, if you are not currently involved at all, I

encourage you to connect with other readers and writers. It's a good way is to start attending open mics and reading series' in your area. Also check if your library or local bookstore has book clubs or writing groups; either of these places are great ways to connect with other readers and writers.

Building an author's platform takes time, but start out trying a lot of different things and then focus on what works.

Chapter 6:

How to Write a Synopsis

The synopsis is generally 500-600 words in length. It should convey the story's entire narrative arc, ending and all.

The synopsis is the part of the submitting process I struggle with the most. A synopsis seems like the best way to take a story and rid it of all its creative energy. However, the synopsis is an important part of the submission for some publishers and agents. If they don't ask for it explicitly don't send it, if they do, of course you have to include it.

In any case, you should have one written before you start submitting, because just avoiding publishers and agents who require one is not a particularly sustainable strategy.

Some publishers will require more than 500-600 words in the synopsis, but if they don't specify this is a good default length for a synopsis.

Because different publishers and agents require different lengths what I do is write out and perfect a two-page version of the synopsis and then I copy and paste the same text into a different file and shorten it, sometimes into several different versions.

Remember that most publishers are looking for any reason to discard your manuscript without doing additional work, so following guidelines is very important for your work to get considered seriously.

One of the ways that I prepare myself for writing synopsis is to go to Wikipedia and look up a book or a movie I like that I have not read or seen for a while. Then I read the synopsis. Most of the time I feel bored reading those synopsis, sometimes though I feel intrigued and want to re-read the book or re-watch the movie. If I feel that way I study that synopsis and see what they did right.

What information did they include? What information did they leave out or simplify? What lessons can you take away from reading this synopsis.

I also practice by writing synopsis of books I didn't write, but really enjoy (I do not post these on Wikipedia in case you are curious). It is easier to pick out what is important in another person's book than your own sometime, and this exercise can really help with that.

The focus in writing a synopsis is not on being creative or impressing anyone with your literary abilities but to focus on clearly and succinctly conveying what your story is about, in terms of plot and character development.

Make sure to focus on your main character (or characters) while writing the synopsis because they can be easier to convey in fewer words than the plot itself (no matter how compelling the plot is).

If you can make the reader connect with a character even in a synopsis, then it will help your chances of landing an agent or

publisher. Only mention secondary characters when absolutely needed. Too many names flying around will just serve to confuse everyone.

Focus on making sure the ending makes sense in terms of the plot and the characters. The ending should have an impact on the characters because that is how a good plot, and a good story work. You should make that connection clear in your synopsis.

Don't include dialogue and don't raise questions that you don't answer in the synopsis. If you have to simplify the plot for the sake of brevity and your synopsis slightly disconnects from your novel there, that is probably for the best. If the end results are the same, it is ok if some steps are skipped over.

Get friends who have not read your book to read the synopsis; make sure it makes sense to them. Can they follow the plot clearly? Are the characters intriguing? These are good questions to ask, and only people who have not read the novel will know the answers based on the synopsis. Non-fiction synopsis serve a

different function. Mostly non-fiction publishers and agents are interested in a chapter by chapter breakdown (some more detailed than other), outlining what will be included in the non-fiction book.

Of course, it really varies between publishers and agents and also between subgenres, what a publisher needs to see in terms of a cook book proposal is very different than what they need to see in terms of a history book proposal. Read guidelines carefully and do follow up research involving any terms you are not comfortable with.

Chapter 7:

How to Get An Agent

As long as you submit to agents and manuscript publishers who accept simultaneous submissions, I don't think there is anything wrong with trying both at the same time. In some ways, both processes are remarkably similar; however, this article focuses on submitting to agents.

Most of the steps in any submission process, to an agent or a publisher, is the same. You have to start out with a complete manuscript. Along with a query letters, most agents want the first twenty pages of the manuscript. I highly suggest you find an excellent editor to focus on editing just the query letter and the first

twenty pages. If you don't want to spend the money, please run it by a writer's group or a group of friends for their feedback.

Some agents also want a full synopsis of the book, although this is rather rare. If they ask for one, provide one. If they don't, do not include one.

Now that everything is ready to go — your query letter, your first twenty pages (or so, as it does differ from agent to agent), and a synopsis – your next big task is to find the right agents. There are many ways to go about this. A great place to start is with this rather long blog post by Neil Gaiman called [Everything You Wanted to Know about Literary Agents](#).

How I look for potential agents is a two-step process. The first step involves using [Agent Query](#) and then reviewing the agents I find there on watchdog sites. This process usually includes a quick Google search, and always includes searching the forums at [Absolute Write](#). Sometimes I also start with browsing the forum

there. It is very active and contains lots of information about agents that is not available elsewhere.

The entire following chapter is devoted to researching agents because I just could not cover all of the essentials here.

I usually compile a list of agents who I would be proud to be represented by, at least 5 agents long. I then submit to each of them, carefully including names and reviewing submission guidelines to make sure I meet their individual needs, which sometimes vary. If I have read (and liked) any of the books they have represented, I mention that, usually including a specific detail so they know I actually read and enjoyed the book.

I keep a word document where I track each of the agents I have submitted to. I update it when I hear back from an agent. I always note personal rejections (which are rare and generally a compliment) and I always keep track of which agencies have rejected me before. All of this is one centralized and well-organized file.

There is no step after this one, you just keep repeating this step. Although you might get rewrite requests, which will require editing again, or you might decide to revise your book on your own.

The other option you have available to you is attending and pitching at writer's conferences or at other events where you directly interact with agents. I think generally the success rate when meeting an agent is much higher. Learn more about writers conferences [here](#) and [here](#). You should never have to pay a specific agent to pitch to them, it should be covered as part of the cost of the conference.

I wish you the best of luck in this process. Always remember: research and persistence are the key.

Chapter 8:

How to Research an Agent

Researching agents can be a time-consuming process, but I would never submit to an agent without first doing significant research.

To me, research is the most important step of the submission process. It is vital, because there is no point going through all the work of writing your manuscript and submitting, just to end up with an agent that does not properly represent you or your manuscript.

An agent that could be a good fit for another author or even another one of your manuscripts might not be the right agent for this particular project. And just like any other industry there are bad agents out there that could misrepresent you in any number of

ways. [Writer Beware](#) (a volunteer organization that works on behalf of writers) has a terrific section on [dishonest agents](#).

It is important to note that many agents do not work alone, and most of the more successful agents, although not all, are part of, or head, a larger agency. When submitting to an agency you often submit to individual agents that work there. Sometimes the agency is very established, but the agents within that agency that are open to unsolicited submissions are the newer ones. All these are important factors to consider when the time comes to submit.

I would say that over half of the agents I research in the genre I write in, I dismiss after researching. Or I put them in a document on my computer with notes about what I liked and didn't like about them, to review for potential submission at a later date. In other words I would consider submitting to them, but only after a significant number of rejections from more established agents.

How to Find Potential Agents

The first step of researching agents is always the same. It involves finding agents that are worth looking into further. There are several

ways to go about this. One is to use an [Agent Query](#) or [Query Tracker](#). This is the way many authors find the agents that end up representing them. Both search engines have lots of filters so it is easy to look for agents that focus on your genre of writing.

Although you should always verify by other means that they actually do focus on that genre, before submitting.

Another method, and the one with which I personally have found the best leads, is to read books in the same genre that you write in, and when you find a book or an author you like, figure out who their agent is. Often the agent is specifically thanked in the Acknowledgements section of the book, but if they are not, Googling the name of the author and the word ‘agent’ will often find the results.

I also use [Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum](#) to find agents.

Usually I look just by browsing the Agents and Publishers forum. I always keep my eye out for the longer threads spanning multiple pages; that could be a good or a bad sign.

Another way is through attending literary conferences. Agents often attend literary conferences, and there are various ways to communicate with them, or pitch to them during the conference. If you are attending a conference specifically to seek agents, research the agents beforehand to see if you would actually want to work with them (and they with you - most agents focus on a specific genre). Also approach with caution any sessions where they are charging you an additional fee to pitch.

How to Research an Agent Outside of their Website

You can also learn a lot about the agent or agency just by browsing their website, but I always research the agent outside their website first. Visiting the website first can color your perspective too much.

I already mentioned [Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum](#) above as a potential way to find agents, but the way I primarily use it is to vet agents (and publishers). The forums are active and get a lot of use. If an author has a good or bad experience with an agent, they often will share it. Other people in the industry also chime in.

Victoria Strauss, the co-founder of *Writer Beware*, is active there.

Because it is a forum and everyone can post, you sometimes have to take entries with a grain of salt. But there is a lot of good information to be had there. If an agent or agency isn't discussed there, it is usually because they are new, small, or not very active, and that itself can be a clear sign, although there are exceptions.

Doing a Google search of the agency or agent is also good. A write-up in [Publishers Weekly](#) can be a good thing, but they also write a lot of "puff pieces" about agents and publishing houses so I try not to take them too seriously. [Wikipedia](#), as most people already know, is not generally a trustworthy source in this area either. One of the things that is valuable is that sometimes the agent is mentioned on author websites (helpful), or the agency is maligned on [Glassdoor](#) (not a good sign).

It is very important to make sure the agency isn't on the [Writer Beware Thumbs Down Agencies](#) List. At this point I almost have the list memorized.

How to Evaluate an Agent's Website

A lot can be learned from the agent's website itself. An established and reputable agent will have the names of at least some of the authors and books they have represented right on their website. It is important that these books and names are currently relevant. For example if they only mention representing one or two authors that were successful 20 years ago but have not published in a decade, they are to be avoided, generally.

But the clearest, best indicator of a legitimate agency that could place your book with a good publisher, in my experience, is their track record, the authors that they work with and the books they represent.

It is very important that an agent be active in the genre that you hope to publish in. If they are not, they do not understand how that genre works, and often don't have the relevant connections that will help your book be considered by the right publishers. If they say they accept your genre but have not represented any books in that genre, I would approach with caution.

It is a good sign if an agent has membership in a professional literary agents' organization. That in and of itself is not a stamp of approval though, it is just an indicator that they are probably competent. Make sure the organization they list is relevant, though; an association with the local writing group is not relevant, neither is a general local business association.

New agents can be good, although they are more of a risk because they don't have a track record. However, you should only consider submitting to a new agent if they have industry experience ([more on that here](#)). They should make it very clear what experience they have on their website.

An agent should never charge an upfront fee. That is a clear indicator that they are not a legitimate agent. The same goes for agents who offer editing services for a fee. A combination editor/agent website is usually a clear warning sign, although those lines are starting to blur. A number of successful agents now run publishing companies and/or have editing services. If that is the case, ideally, these different businesses will remain separate. For

example an author taken on by the agent will not be offered a contract by that agent's publishing company or be encouraged to use that agent's paid editorial services. Sometimes this multi-business approach is clear on the agent's site itself, other times [Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum](#) is where it is mentioned. If it is talked about on the forum, it is usually clear if the agency manages to runs multiple businesses in a legitimate way, or not. Always look for fees and signs of multiple businesses or redirection on the website.

In Conclusion

Researching agents might seem overwhelming at first, but the good news is the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Spending a lot of time researching agents helps, but so does spending time increasing your base of knowledge by reading [Writers Beware](#). One picks up warning signs much quicker as one's base of knowledge expands.

Because it is important to keep track of the research one does, not to mention the submissions one makes, I have two files on my

computer devoted to agents and publishers. One includes notes about the agents and publishers I am considering submitting to, as well as a list of agencies and publishers I do not want to consider in the future. The other file tracks my submissions to agents and publishers. It indicates the responses I have received and how long it took to receive them. If I received a request for a full manuscript before receiving a rejection, I make sure to indicate that. These two files help the submission process immensely.

Chapter 9:

The Seven Most Common Manuscript Submission Mistakes

When I talk to agents, writers, and editors—I always hear them complain of the same mistakes over and over again. The other day I was reading a back issue of *Poets & Writers*. It was based on the question: "What kind of submissions do you not take seriously?" (I am paraphrasing here.) I was able to guess exactly what the agents would say in response to this question.

Even writers who write imaginative and creative pieces are capable of falling into the same traps, particularly if you don't know what other writers are doing in terms of submissions or what agent's and editor's expectations are. Speaking from personal experience, I made a lot of mistakes when I started submitting.

Agents and editors are so used to seeing query letters and sample chapters day in and day out, but most writers only interact with their own submission packet. It is always good to start by seeking out other author's submission packets.

Another good place to start? Learning what not to do. Below I cover the top 7 most common complaints agents and editors have about submission packets. All of the reasons are based on information I have learned from talking directly with agents, writers, and editors. This is concrete information you can use to craft the best submission packet you can.

1. The Submission Did NOT Obey Their Submission Guidelines

Agents and publishers receive submissions all the time where the submitter does not follow directions at all. They include the whole manuscript when only the first 30 pages are asked for. They don't include a cover letter at all. They submit a marketing packet instead of a manuscript or cover letter. The variety of mistakes are wide ranging, but the fact remains the same – the author did not follow the agent or publisher's submission guidelines at all.

Submission guidelines exist for a reason. Ignore them at your peril. Most of the editors I have talked to either automatically reject submissions that do not follow guidelines, or they refuse to respond to them entirely.

2. They Didn't Submit to the Right Agent or Publisher

There is no way to predict which agent or publisher will be the right fit for you or your novel. But it is pretty easy to eliminate ones that won't fit at all based on genre.

If you have written a young adult (YA) book, don't submit it to a publisher that does not publish YA. They will not accept your book. If you submit your work of fantasy to an agent that only focuses on literary fiction, then they will not accept it.

Most authors think of this in terms of what the agent or publisher explicitly states on their site that they don't publish. When submitting to agents, however, it is important to see what books they represent. For example, an agent might not say: "No Fantasy." At the same time, the only books he has represented are works of literary fiction. Even if he was to be won over by your wonderful dragon filled novel (which is unlikely), he probably would not be the right person to represent it because his connections are in a different genre.

Also, and this is a bit of a tangent, but most small publishers who accept unsolicited submissions and are open to multiple genres. They do not sell as many books as those publishers who focus on one or two niche markets. If you have a fantasy novel, it is

generally best to place it with a science-fiction and fantasy focused publisher.

3. Do Not Include Rhetorical Questions

What would you do if your parents were killed by pirates? What would you do if you could breath underwater? What would you do if your boyfriend became a werewolf?

These and many other rhetorical questions are something that agents are so used to seeing in cover letters that some agencies just toss them into a pile together and leave it at that.

Sometimes an entire paragraph of a cover letter is devoted to rhetorical questions, while other times it is just a sentence or two. But after reading a few hundred or so of them, most agents grow to dislike them.

It is really easy not to use them in a cover letter and really much more effective. So, remove them if you have any in yours. They

might seem like a fun way to intrigue the agent, but that isn't what the agent is thinking.

4. Don't Talk About Copyright

Never say you have copyrighted your book with the Library of Congress. Your book is copyrighted the moment you put the words on paper. To have it done officially dates your material--forever. Let the publisher do that.

A book with a copyright date of 2013, and submitted in 2016, speaks volumes to an editor or agent. It means it's been shopped around, a lot! If you are really worried someone will steal your material, then register it with the Writers' Guild, east or west. For a small fee, they will record the work, proving when you wrote it. And then, unless you are submitting to an entertainment agent or producer, keep your mouth shut. Copyright marks and WGA numbers suggest you don't trust the people to you are submitting your work.

[Joyce Holland, Literary Agent](#) writes: “Tempted to use this symbol © instead of talking about copyright directly? Don't! It sends the message that not only do you not trust the agent, you are new to submitting.” [I talk more about the issues that arise from copywriting any creative work that has not found a publisher here.](#)

5. Don't Query (Yet)

Most publishers and agents mention a time frame within which they respond to most submissions. For some publishers, it is 2-4 months; for others, it is a week or 6 months. After that time has passed and you have not heard from them, it is fine to query.

Querying involves sending a polite email inquiring about your submission. I actually like waiting an extra month on top of the time they mention before querying, just to be polite.

If they don't mention a time frame at all, don't query for at least six months. If they ask you not to query, don't! These are rules they set in place for a reason, even if they are frustrating, but more importantly, querying too quickly, or bothering them too frequently

about your work can really tick them off. It can also send them the wrong message – that if they were representing you, you would be very needy. Don't do that.

6. Politeness and Formality Is a Must

I have already talked a little about how important politeness is if you are following up on your manuscript, but it is vitally important throughout the entire process.

I've seen cover letters that are rude. Usually along the lines of this:

"You are so very lucky to receive my wonderful manuscript."

Often the rudeness is right at the end of the cover letter, such as signing off with this line: "I can't wait to receive the acceptance letter that you will send me."

It is also particularly important to respond politely, or not at all, if they decline your submission. Sending them an email imploring them to give your work a second look or calling them out for rejecting your work, will only do you harm. Remember: agents,

agencies, and publishers talk to each other. If you behave badly, it could hurt your reputation at a much larger scale than you might be thinking.

Remember that it isn't just when engaging with the agent directly that you have to be polite. If you are polite via email, but then blog or tweet to complain about the whole experience, the agent will likely find out. They will then be even less pleased.

It is also important to be formal with your cover letter. Just like you would be formal for a job (although, honestly, I have read a lot of rude and informal cover letters in my day).

Think of this as a time make an impression that is professional. Even if your book is the new version of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, you want your cover letter to convey reliability. Unless you already have a Hunter S. Thompson like publication backlog, in which case you would probably not be reading this book.

But don't go over the top. I have read a cover letter where every other word was archaic and appeared to be pulled from the thesaurus. It did not make a positive impression.

7. Know the Agent's Name

“Number one on my list of things never to do is to address a query to 30 or 40 agents or editors at the same time. I'm talking about listing them in the header of your query. We usually toss those without even reading the subject line. Someone sent me one yesterday addressed to at least 50 other agents. I took a moment and tried to figure out what their reasoning might be. Did the writer think I would immediately jump on the material, worried someone would beat me out of a bestseller? Really?

I'm not foolish enough to think authors aren't submitting to more than one agent or editor at a time. I certainly do, but I never list them so *everyone* knows. By the same reasoning

don't ever, ever send material to all the agents at one agency. We do talk to one another.

I recently received a query stating the author had done his homework and investigated dozens of agents and agencies. It boiled down to me being the perfect person to represent his masterpiece. (Yes, that's what he called it.) Unfortunately, for him, he addressed the query to Ms. Gallagher. Lesson: Be very careful before you press the send button.”

—*Joyce Holland, Literary Agent*

When you submit directly to a publisher, unless they specifically state which editor you are submitting to, you don't know the editors name. If you know the editors name, use it. If it isn't obviously provided for you - don't use a name. Just say Dear Editors. Assume that more than one will see your submission.

Chapter 10:

Agent Versus Publisher

I wish there were more ongoing discussions about looking for an agent versus submitting directly to a publisher, but honestly, they are fairly rare. Many books and websites about publishing act as in there is only one way forward: agents.

That is not how it works at all. There are many publishers including imprints of the Big Five that will accept unsolicited submissions. That said, there are arguments for agents, but it should not be considered your only option.

When I submit, it is generally to both publishers and agents. You do not have to decide on one or the other at first. The majority of both accept simultaneous submissions. Even if your book is

accepted by a publisher, that does not mean it is too late to find an agent. I know authors whose book was accepted by a publisher and then they had no issues finding an agent when they actively struggled to secure one before.

Whether an agent is needed after an acceptance is also up for debate, but I do think they can help you negotiate a better contract and help you find homes for future books.

Arguments for Agents

A literary agent is someone who will act on your behalf, dealing with publishers and promoting the authors work. This is their job and a good agent really understand how publishing works and has connections to benefit you. You don't need to do the same kind of leg work researching companies (although, some authors do end up doing that).

Agents understand and know book contracts and publishers in a way authors don't. They can also help you negotiate a better

contract with some publishers. Some publishers simply don't negotiate. For them, contracts are a one size fits all deal.

Agents can submit work to almost any publisher and your work won't get caught in the same sort of slush pile (generally). This should encourage faster response times and that your manuscript might be viewed in a more favorable light, particularly if that publisher has a good relationship with your agent.

An agent can protect you from going with the wrong publisher. An agent can also help you communicate with your publisher if your work gets delayed.

When an agent submits your manuscript to a publisher, it is generally the whole manuscript. Most manuscript publishers request that you just submit the first three chapters initially (although there are exceptions).

An agent can help you turn your novel into something that is more desirable for publishers because an agent has a more tuned perspective to what publishers like.

Arguments Against Agents

Just like there are bad publishers, there are also bad agents. So you have to do your research in much the same way, and that can take time and effort as well. Read the article [The Safest Way to Search For an Agent](#) before proceeding. One of the best free reputable search engines for agents is [Agent Query](#). You can start looking for an agent there. But if you are going to do it right, it is good to look up every agent you find on Absolute Write's [Water Cooler listing of agencies](#). This is a forum that very actively discusses agents (even more than publishers) and there is a lot of good information to be found there.

There is one less time delayed step to go through when you submit directly to an agent. A good agent will generally get back to you within a month and a half, but that response is usually not an acceptance. Rather, it is a request for the full manuscript after reading your query or proposal.

Sometimes an agent, even after taking you on as a client, will take a long time to place your work. Direct submissions to publishers can really speed up turnaround times.

Agents receive a percentage of the money you receive for your book. Since authors do not make that much, unless they are best sellers, this can really affect your income and financial stability.

Arguments for Direct Submissions

It can be a lot faster to submit to publishers directly. When you submit a query to various agents, you have to wait for a request for full manuscript. Then if they like that full manuscript, there is the finalizing of the contract with them, then waiting for them to give you edits or feedback (which does not always happens but often does) on your manuscript, editing your piece to comply with that feedback, and then they start submitting to manuscript publishers. Where as you can start submitting queries to manuscript publishers right away.

In some markets like science fiction, romance, and non-fiction, it can be just as easy to place a book without an agent as with one.

The publishers are much more set up for the direct submissions and many process them quickly and allow simultaneous submissions. Some publishers even prefer direct submissions.

If you already know who you want to publish your book and they accept direct submissions, why not make sure your work is submitted there by just doing it.

Arguments Against Direct Submissions

The dreaded slush pile is a major argument against direct submissions. Your work is generally taken more seriously and responded to more quickly if an agent represents you.

You can't submit directly to all publishers, so if you have your heart set on a publisher that only accepts represented submissions, then find an agent. Do keep in mind that many of the Big Five publishers have at least one imprint open to un-represented submissions.

Chapter 11:

How To Evaluate A

Publisher for Your Book

How can you check the legitimacy of a publisher if you don't know much about the industry? Even if a publisher is legitimate, how do you know that they will do right by your work?

These are complicated questions, but knowing how to evaluate a publisher, and knowing your own personal standards should make it relatively easy to find publishers that work for your needs.

This chapter should give you concrete steps to answering these complicated questions.

How to Make Sure a Company is Legitimate

I have spent quite a lot of time evaluating publishers for Authors Publish. Sometimes I have already read several books that have been printed by a publisher I am reviewing. Sometimes they publish in a genre I have never read, such as romance, and I don't know a thing about the publisher before going into the research.

This lack of initial knowledge has proven very helpful and taught me a lot about publishing, and a fair amount about the romance genre.

The first time I encountered the phrase "Heat Levels," I was deeply confused. Now it just part of my knowledge base.

Now, within two minutes of being on a publisher's website, I usually know if they fit our [standards](#) for a review or not.

One or more of the following things usually eliminates a publisher in the first three minutes of visiting their website.

There is a mention of fees of any kind.

Some legitimate publishers are charging reading fees now, but that doesn't make it okay. If they mention a fee for editing or anything like that, then they are eliminated. They are not a traditional publisher; they are just a vanity press posing as a traditional publisher. Some companies talk about a cooperative payment approach. If they do that, then run in the opposite direction.

They are trying to sell you something else (and it isn't a book).

I have no problems with publishers encouraging interested authors to buy a book that the publisher has already published. That is a good idea. But what I do have a problem with is this: a publisher whose website that is really pushing or promoting additional services of any kind. [This website](#) is a good example of what to avoid.

They have been around for under a year.

Most presses fail in the first three years, so over three years old is ideal. If you are a new author, you sometimes have to take a risk

on a new publisher. Sometimes these risks pay off, but there is no reason not to monitor that press, and not submit to them, during the first year.

They have been around for two years and have published less than one book.

This is usually an indicator that they are 1) disorganized, and 2) struggling financially.

They have not published anything in the last year.

If an older publisher has not published anything for a full year, then it is not generally a good sign.

If they have only published a few books, I make sure these books are not just written by the publisher themselves.

Lots of writers these days set up companies just to make it seem like they are not self-publishing. Some of these grow into legitimate publishers, and some do not.

Their website is not functioning properly.

I don't think I need to elaborate on this point.

The Next Steps

If a publisher makes it past those first easy to check hurdles, I check the [Writer's Beware thumbs down list](#) to make sure they are not listed.

I also Google them. This often is not helpful, but sometimes equals good information. If there is ever a listing from Glass Door on the Google list, make sure to read it. These reports are usually made by employees of the company, such as editors. They may (or may not) be authors themselves, but if employees are unhappy, then this is generally not a good sign.

If I was actually submitting to this company, I would make sure that they publish in the same genre in which I write.

How to Make Sure It Meets Your Personal Standards

Would you be happy if the publisher you submitted to had chosen to publish your book?

This might seem obvious, but often times writers get so nervous or start to think it is a numbers game in terms of submissions out, that they submit to publishers that are legitimate but do not meet their personal standards.

For example, I know someone who submitted to an eBook-only publisher and their work was accepted; they signed the contract. The only problem with that was that they didn't want eBook only. They wanted an actual physical book. So they were not happy.

I cannot set your personal standards for you because I do not know you, but I think it might help you to see mine. It will help to get a good, concrete idea about what I am talking about:

I am only interested in a print publisher with good distribution.

If they have good distribution I usually know because they mention the distribution company, or I see their books in bookstores all the time.

That clearly eliminates a lot of publishers, even a lot of the ones I have reviewed, but at least I know that. That helps me eliminate even more potential publishers, even quicker.

But for every author, the standards are different; the preferences are different. Just make sure you are submitting to companies that actually want to publish your manuscript.

Chapter 12:

The Self-Publishing

Conundrum and The

Importance of Patience

The first thing I want to make very clear is that I don't have any problems with self-publishing. I have read some very good self-published books. I know some very successful self-published authors. That said, I know a far larger amount of people who regret self-publishing at least one of their books.

The *Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submission* is clearly not about self-publishing, and so I hesitated to bring it up at all;

however, I felt that I had to because self-publishing is so prevalent today and most people who self-publish for the first time don't do enough research before starting out.

If you want to be a self-published author, I encourage you to self-publish. On the contrary, I would say that the slight majority of people who self-publish do so because they see it as a step towards getting a traditional publisher or agent. This is not true!

How do I know that many self-published authors think this way? Because they have told me in conversations over the phone and at writer's retreats and book talks. This idea of self-publishing ones' work in order to get it traditionally published comes up again and again.

A couple times a month I receive an email from an author. The email always looks something like this:

Dear Emily,

I recently finished and self-published my novel, *If Looks Could*. I am now ready to find a traditional publisher. Can you help me?

Sincerely,

John Smith

The problem with this idea is that if you really want a traditional publisher, it is much easier to approach a publisher or an agent with a [manuscript](#), not a self published book (there is one exception to this rule that I will elaborate on later).

Most traditional publishers, particularly the ones who accept un-agented submissions, will not even allow authors to submit self-published work at all. It is against their rules. They will consider an unpublished novel, or sometimes one that had been previously published by another publishing house, but not one that has been previously self-published. [I did compile a list of a number of publishers open to self-published reprints.](#)

I know a writer who thought this was a ridiculous rule and he submitted his manuscript to publishers without telling them that it had been previously self-published. One of them did accept his manuscript. At that point, he had to tell them the truth before signing the contract. They dropped his book and told him not to submit to them again. He had violated their trust.

Agents are also not interested in self-published books with the same exception that publishers have. That exception is that you have managed to *sell* a huge number of copies on your own. I placed emphasis on the word *sell*, because even if you are regularly giving away thousands of copies, most publishers and agents will not take you seriously.

There are lots of stories about authors self-publishing and then having their book published by a traditional publisher. The problem is that most people don't focus on the fact that these authors whose books are being chosen by traditional publishers are

successful self-published authors who have already sold thousands of copies of their book without the help of a traditional publisher.

I am not telling anyone to not self-publish. I think there are a lot of great opportunities that come out of self-publishing. But I am encouraging individuals not to self-publish if their main goal is traditional publishing.

Part of the reason many authors who want to go the traditional route end up self-publishing is the amount of work and time involved in traditional publishing. You often have to be incredibly patient in order to jump through all the hoops traditional publishing involves: First you have to query with a partial manuscript, then a full manuscript, then if your manuscript is accepted, there are rounds of edits and publishers fitting you into their schedules.

It can take a decade of work to get your first book published. This is not uncommon. I don't say this to upset readers of this book, many of whom might find a home for their book well before that. Yet, I want you to know the time involved. It's not just the time,

but the active effort involved in submitting during this time. Just waiting a decade with a finished manuscript and not submitting it anywhere will not get it published (I should know, having tried that strategy more than once).

If anything, I want this fact that it takes a lot of time to find a worthwhile publisher to encourage you! The minute I finished my last novel (about two years ago), friends started asking me who was going to publish it. When was it coming out? I had not even written a query letter for it yet. I found this attitude incredibly discouraging. Now not all these friends were writers, but many of them were, but none of them had published a novel. The people I know that had published novels did not ask me these questions. They knew it would take time and effort.

Don't let other's expectations on this matter affect you. That is why I am warning you about the time it takes. The good news is that if you find a good agent and a good publisher the first time out

you hopefully will not have to go through this long process again, it just becomes easier and easier.

If you self-publish, the time between your manuscript being complete and it being a published thing available in the world is much shorter. It could even be a matter of days. However, generally authors of self-published work spend a lot of time and effort putting their book out there after it is self-published without any experienced support. They might have to do just as much work or more in the long run to make their book successful, but it is just on the other side of publication.

Chapter 13:

The Top 30 Publishers for New Authors

The writing market can be overwhelming, particularly for new authors who do not have a history of past publication. It is important to note that no legitimate established presses specifically look for unpublished authors. The presses on this list were chosen because they have published a number of debut books before.

Also, the publishers on this list do not require literary agents. You can submit to these publishers directly.

It is always helpful to create a history of previous publications of short fiction or poetry by submitting to literary journals. To learn more about submitting to literary journals, you can download our free eBook on the subject [here](#).

All 30 of these manuscript publishers all have good distribution and clear marketing strategies. They are not vanity presses, self-publishers, or brand new presses. They are established publishing houses with good reputations.

Some of the publishers listed below are imprints of the "Big 5" publishers. None of the "Big 5" accept submissions directly, but some of their imprints do. Others are independent companies, some are based in the United States and others are based in the UK or elsewhere.

All the publishers listed below are open to authors regardless of nationality. Most of the publishers focus on publishing a particular genre or genres of books. The publishers are listed in no particular order.

Our full reviews of the publishers include more detailed submission information and links to the publishing company's websites and submission guidelines. Not all of them are open submissions at this time, but many are. It is good to bookmark the websites of publishers you are interested in that are not currently open to submissions, and to check back regularly, if they do not overtly state when they will re-open to submissions.

1. Chronicle Books

Chronicle is a large independent San Francisco-based publisher that publishes highly acclaimed children's books, bestselling

cookbooks, gift books, and a variety of non-fiction. Most have a strong visual element. Their books are beautifully made. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

2. Tor/Forge

Tor/Forge publishes science fiction and fantasy books. Run by Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, Tor/Forge is an imprint of Macmillan, one of the big five publishers. Tor is one of the most established science fiction publishers and they have won the Locus Award for best SF publisher 26 years in a row. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

3. Avon Impulse

Avon Romance is a romance imprint of HarperCollins. Avon Impulse is their digital-first imprint and they publish primarily new authors. If your book does well in terms of digital sales and is over 25,000 words in length, it will receive a print run and have good distribution. Books that receive a print run are officially published by Avon Romance for the print edition (and not Impulse). [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

4. Hard Case Crime

Hard Case Crime is a well-respected and established niche publisher of hard-boiled crime novels. The publisher has been featured in a number of respected publications, including Time

Magazine and The Stranger. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

5. DAW

DAW is an imprint of Penguin books. They publish science fiction and fantasy books, and have published authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Roger Zelazny. DAW has published many bestselling books and has published Hugo Award winning books. [Read the full review here.](#)

6. Turner Books

Turner publishes books in a wide range of categories and formats—fiction and non-fiction. They publish mainly in print but have electronic options as well. They are a major independent publishing house and have a number of imprints. [Read the full review here.](#)

7. Persea Books

This is a respected publisher of fiction, non-fiction, poetry manuscripts, and literary young adult novels. The work they publish receives good distribution, particularly in academic circles. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

8. Source Books

A large independent publisher based out of Illinois, they also have offices in Connecticut and New York. They are open to unsolicited

submissions for a wide range of genres, from non-fiction to romance. [Read our full review here.](#)

9. Baen

Baen is a publisher of science fiction and fantasy novels. They have published a large number of bestsellers, and many of the most respected science fiction and fantasy novelists regularly publish with them. [To learn more, read our review of Baen.](#)

10. Seven Stories Press

They focus on producing books that have a social conscience. They have published some big names and some bestsellers. They publish literary fiction and non-fiction. [To learn more read our full review here.](#)

11. Triangle Square

Triangle Square is an imprint of Seven Stories Press that focuses on publishing young adult novels and children's books. They focus on publishing high quality writing that is educational, and recently published Pulitzer Prize winner Jared Diamond's first science book for children, *The Third Chimpanzee for Young People*. [Our full review is here.](#)

12. Coffee House Prsss

Coffee House Press (CHP) is a respected literary press with a great reputation. They are only open for short submission periods every year in March and September. These periods are capped at

300 submissions, so submit early. During the last open period they had reached 300 submissions on the third day. Coffee House Press publishes emerging and midcareer authors. They do not focus on bestsellers, but their books are often taught in academic settings and available in libraries and independent bookstores. Read our full review [here](#).

13. Flashlight Press

Flashlight is an award winning publisher of illustrated children's books. They publish books aimed at 4-8-year-olds. They only publish 2-4 books every year, so they are very selective. Their books are beautifully illustrated, and also receive good distribution internationally and nationally. [Read the full review here.](#)

14. Oneworld Publishing

An independent publisher founded in 1986, they now publish around 100 works of non-fiction and literary fiction every year. They work with distributors and authors worldwide, although they are only open to unsolicited submissions of non-fiction. [Read the full review here.](#)

15. Clarion

Clarion Books is an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books, a publisher you have almost certainly heard of, as they are established, and have published many classics. None of Houghton Mifflin's other imprints are open to unsolicited submissions, just Clarion. [Read our full review here.](#)

16. Black & White Publishing

Black & White Publishing was founded in 1995 and is now one of the largest Scottish publishers. They currently have over 200 books in print. They have good distributor and are starting to break into the eBook publishing world. They publish general non-fiction, biography, sport, and humor, as well as selected fiction, Young Adult, and Children's books. [Read our full review here.](#)

17. Angry Robot

Angry Robot is a respected science fiction and fantasy publisher that occasionally dips into related genres (such as urban fantasy, steampunk, and horror). Angry Robot was originally funded by HarperCollins. They are now part of Watkins Media Ltd. They offer advances and good royalty rates. [Read our full review here.](#)

18. The Quarto Publishing Group

The Quarto Publishing Group is an international publishing house known for its illustrated books. They publish most of their work through a number of niche imprints, each with their own focus. All of their US imprints are distributed by Hachette. Their imprints are all non-fiction. They publish a lot of cookbooks and gift books. They also have imprints covering almost any non-fiction topic you can think of, including children's nonfiction, parenting, vehicles and architecture. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

19. Evernight

Evernight is an eBook publisher of romance and erotica novels. They also publish print versions of some books. A number of the books they have published have been on the Amazon Bestseller list. The books they publish are all romance and erotica but they are open to sub-genres within these genres. [Read our full review here.](#)

20. Absey & Company

Absey & Company has published many award-winning books in the last decade. They are an established small press that publishes full-length works of poetry and prose. [To learn more, read the full review.](#)

21. Felony & Mayhem

This is a respected publisher of literary mystery novels. They publish great books and have good distribution. [To learn more, read our review here.](#)

22. Chicago Review Press

Chicago Review Press was founded over 40 years ago. They are an established independent publisher of literary fiction, non-fiction and memoir. They also publish books for children (but not picture books). They were founded by Curt Matthews and his wife, Linda Matthews. Curt was the former editor of the literary journal the Chicago Review. [To learn more, read the full review here.](#)

23. Peachtree Publishers

Peachtree Publishers is a well respected independent publisher with good distribution. They are based out of Atlanta, Georgia, and specialize in publishing children's books, young adult books, self-help titles for parents and educators and guides to the American south. They also publish books on gardening and cookbooks, but usually only with a southern focus. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

24. Gibbs Smith

Gibbs Smith is an established publisher with good distribution and a focus on cookbooks, interior design and architecture books, and board books for children. They have published a number of bestsellers, including a board book version of *Pride & Prejudice*. Gibbs Smith is primarily a non-fiction publisher which is just now entering the fiction market for adults and middle readers. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

25. Entangled Publishing

Entangled Publishing is an independent publisher of adult and young adult romantic fiction. Since its first release in July 2011, Entangled has published more than 970 titles. This number includes 14 titles that have made it onto the *New York Times* Bestsellers list and 42 titles that have placed on the *USA Today* Bestsellers list. Some of their more famous books are *The*

Marriage Bargain, and *Obsidian* by Jennifer L. Armentrout. [You can read our full review here.](#)

26. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Founded in 1911 and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company is an independent publisher of religious books. They have a large range, including academic books and reference works in theology, biblical studies, and religious history to popular titles in spirituality, social and cultural criticism, as well as literature. Not all of their books, particularly their children's books, are overtly religious. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

27. Barron's Educational Services

Most people who have studied for a test like the SAT or the GRE own a book published by Barron's, if only because they bought one of their many test prep books. That is what Barron's Educational Services is best known for and the reason it was founded in 1939. However, in recent years they have expanded and they also publish a wide variety of other genres, including fiction. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

28. Quirk Books

This Philadelphia-based press publishes just 25 books a year in a whole range of genres, from children's books to non-fiction to science fiction. Unlike many publishers that tackle a large range of

topics, Quirk Books has a clear marketing plan and to a certain degree their books have a cohesive feel, because they all are quirky. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

29. Albert Whitman & Company

Albert Whitman & Company has been around since 1919. Their best-known series is *The Boxcar Children*. Over the past few years they have started to focus on publishing a larger number of books each year. Their goal is to be publishing 150 new books a year by 2020. They publish middle-grade fiction, picture books, and young adult novels. They consider proposals and unsolicited manuscripts in all of these categories. They publish fiction and non-fiction picture books. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

30. Page Street Publishing

Page Street Publishing is a publisher of full color, mostly hardcover, gift books, cookbooks, and craft-books. Most of them have an important visual component. To get a good feel for what they have published in the past, you can [go here](#). They are distributed through Macmillan in every country but Canada (where they have a different distributor). They publish around sixty titles a year. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

Chapter 14:

13 Imprints of Big 5

Publishers Open to

Unsolicited Submissions

Getting published by one of the big five publishers (Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster) might seem impossible without an agent, but it is not.

Most of these publishers have an imprint that accepts unsolicited submissions or queries. These imprints are sometimes very specific in terms of what genre they publish, others are very broad.

Some are print and many are digital first. Digital first, in most cases, means they publish an eBook version and if it does well, they follow it up with a traditional print run. Not all of them are currently open to submissions at this time, but all have plans to re-

open. It is good to bookmark and regularly check back in on one of the websites to see if they have reopened to submissions.

The great thing about being published by one of the big five is they have more design, marketing, and editing expertise than most other publishers open to unsolicited submissions.

Publishing with one of these imprints is a great way to get your foot in the door.

Loveswept and Flirt

Loveswept and Flirt are Random House's digital only imprints focused on romance and women's fiction. They are accepting queries for submissions in contemporary romance, erotica, historical romance, paranormal romance, women's fiction, and new adult.

SMP Swerve

St Martin's Press is an imprint of Macmillan. SMP Swerve is the digital first romance publishing imprint of St Martin's. SMP Swerve is open to all sub-genres of romance. The length of your manuscript must be between 25 thousand and 100 thousand words.

Dial Books For Young Readers

Dial Books For Young Readers publishes hardcover books aimed at children of all ages, including young adults. They are an imprint of Penguin that accepts unsolicited submissions. The catch? They

do not respond to unsolicited submissions unless they are interested in the book. That means don't expect a rejection from Dial, personal or otherwise.

Forever Yours

Forever is the romance imprint of Grand Central Publishing. Grand Central Publishing is the imprint of the Hachette Book Group. Forever Yours is the digital sister of Forever, they focus on publishing unagented authors, and often publish authors without a publication history. They publish eBooks, but they an option to print on demand any book over 50,000 words in length.

Alibi

Alibi is Random House's digital first imprint that focuses on publishing mysteries and thrillers. All Alibi books are initially published as eBooks, but if they do well, a print version will also be published. Alibi books have a marketing team devoted to them.

WITNESS Impulse

WITNESS Impulse is a digital first imprint of Harper Collins. They publish a wide variety of mystery novels, including digital editions by some of the most famous mystery writers of all time, including my personal favorite Agatha Christie. However, they also publish new and emerging authors. It is important to note they usually publish print editions of their books. However, they always publish the digital version first.

Tor/Forge

Tor/Forge publishes science fiction and fantasy books. Run by Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, Tor/Forge is an imprint of Macmillan, one of the big five publishers. Tor is one of the most established science fiction publishers and they have won the Locus Award for best SF publisher 27 years in a row. They offer advances.

Avon Romance

Avon Romance is a romance imprint of HarperCollins. Avon Impulse is their digital first imprint and they publish primarily new authors because of this. If your book does well in terms of digital sales and it is over 25,000 words in length, it will receive a print run and receive good distribution. Books that receive a print run are officially published by Avon Romance for the print edition (and not Impulse).

Harlequin

Harlequin is easily the most famous romance only publisher out there. In fact, their name was synonymous with romance novels when I was growing up. They have wide distribution, from grocery stores to bookstores. They are everywhere. A few years ago HarperCollins purchased the company.

Carina Press

Carina Press is Harlequin's digital first adult fiction imprint, publishing first in digital, and then depending on the numbers releasing audio and print versions as well. Unlike most of [Harlequin's](#) imprints, they don't just focus on romance, although they are open to all subgenres of romance, including contemporary, paranormal, LGBTQ+, and science fiction. They also publish mysteries of all flavors—from cozies to thrillers, with and without romantic elements. They, like Harlequin, are owned by HarperCollins

[DAW](#)

DAW is an imprint of Penguin that is open to manuscript submissions from authors without an agent. This is unusual and a great opportunity. DAW is a highly respected publisher of Science Fiction and Fantasy. DAW has published authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Roger Zelazny. DAW has published many bestselling books and they have published Hugo award winning books. So they are respected and popular.

[Hydra](#)

Hydra is a digital first Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror imprint of Random House. That means that they publish manuscripts in an e-book format that is available everywhere (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc). If the book does well digitally, a print edition will

follow. They are open to queries and will try to respond to all queries within a month.

HarperLegend

HarperLegend is a digital first imprint from HarperOne which is itself an imprint of Harper Collins. HarperLegend is looking to publish a very specific kind of book that they describe as visionary fiction.

Chapter 15:

Manuscript Publishers

Always Open to

Submissions

Many publishers open and close their doors to unsolicited submissions on a routine basis. It can sometimes be hard to determine if they are open or shut to submissions and when you should submit.

These twenty featured publishers are always open to submissions from writers without agents or previous publishing experience. All of them are respected publishers with good reputations. They are listed in no particular order.

All full reviews include links to the publisher's website.

1. Quirk Books

This Philadelphia based press publishes 25 books a year in a whole range of genres, including children's books, nonfiction, and science fiction. Unlike most publishers that tackle a large range of topics, Quirk books has a clear marketing plan for all of their books. To a certain degree their books have a cohesive feel, because they all are quirky. [Read the full review here.](#)

2. Baen

Baen is one of the best known publishers of science fiction and fantasy books. They are one of the few established publishers that will accept full length manuscripts from authors who do not have an agent. They do not need to see any history of publication either. As long as your book is science fiction or fantasy, they will consider publishing it. [Read the full review here.](#)

3. Chicago Review Press

Chicago Review Press was founded over 40 years ago. They are an established independent publisher of literary fiction, non-fiction and memoir. They also publish books for children (but not picture books). They were founded by Curt Matthews and his wife, Linda Matthews. Curt was the former editor of the literary journal the Chicago Review. [To learn more, read our review.](#)

4. Dial Books For Young Readers

Dial Books For Young Readers publishes hardcover books aimed

at children of all ages, including young adults. They are an imprint of Penguin that accepts unsolicited submissions. The catch? They do not respond to unsolicited submissions unless they are interested in the book. That means don't expect a rejection from Dial, personal or otherwise. [Read our full review.](#)

5. Seven Stories Press

They focus on producing books that have a social conscience. They have published some big name authors and bestselling books. They publish literary fiction and non-fiction. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

6. Chronicle Books

Chronicle is an established and respected publisher of children's books, cookbooks, gift books, anthologies, and various other books, most containing a strong visual element. They are based out of San Francisco. Their books receive a lot of positive attention and acclaim. [Read the full review here.](#)

7. DAW

DAW is an imprint of Penguin books. They publish science fiction and fantasy books. DAW has published authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Roger Zelazny. They have published many bestselling books, including Hugo award winning ones. [Read the full review here.](#)

8. Persea Books

This is a respected publisher of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and literary young adults novels. The work they publish receives good distribution, particularly in academic circles. [To learn more, read our full review here.](#)

9. Source Books

A large independent publisher based out of Illinois, they also have offices in Connecticut and New York. They are open to unsolicited submissions of a wide range, including non-fiction and romance manuscripts. [Read our full review here.](#)

10. Turner Books

Turner publishes books in a wide range of categories and formats—fiction and non-fiction. They publish mainly in print but have electronic options as well. They are a major independent publishing house and have a number of imprints. [Read the full review here.](#)

11. ABDO Books

ABDO Books is a publisher that focuses exclusively on educational books for children between the ages of 4 and 12. They sell a lot of books to schools and appear to be rather good at niche marketing. They are currently open only to fiction submissions. [To learn more, read the full review.](#)

12. Black & White Publishing

Black & White Publishing was founded in 1995 and is a Scottish publisher with good distribution. They currently have over 200 books in print. They have good distributor and are starting to break into the eBook publishing world. They publish general non-fiction, biography, sport, and humor, as well as selected fiction, young adult, and children's books. [Read our full review here.](#)

13. Tor/Forge

Tor/Forge publishes science fiction and fantasy books. Run by Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, Tor/Forge is an imprint of Macmillan, one of the big five publishers. Tor is one of the most established science fiction publishers and they have won the Locus Award for best SF publisher 27 years in a row. They offer advances. [Read the full review here.](#)

14. Lyrical Press

Lyrical Press is an electronic only imprint of Kensington, a large independent publisher. Kensington and Lyrical both publish mainstream novels and seem to put a fair amount of pressure on the author to promote their books. They publish a large number of books per year. [Read the full review.](#)

15. The Totally Entwined Group

The Totally Entwined Group is an eBook and print publisher that was successful in its own right, before being purchased by the

Bonnier Publishing group. There have been some shifts in focus since Bonnier purchased it in 2015, but the group still has a good reputation and its focus is still on its two flagship established imprints – Pride and Totally Bound. [Read the full review.](#)

16. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Founded in 1911 and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company is an independent publisher of religious books. They have a large range, including academic books and reference works in theology, biblical studies, and religious history to popular titles in spirituality, social and cultural criticism, as well as literature. They are primarily a print publisher with excellent distribution. [To learn more, read our full review.](#)

17. LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS' motto is "About Everyone. For Everyone". They focus on publishing multicultural children's books. They are the largest multicultural book publisher in the U.S. The books they publish largely have an educational element and they offer books for readers starting at the age of 4 and going all the way up to age 18. They are an independent publisher, have published hundreds of books, and have been around for 25 years. [Read our full review here.](#)

18. Barron's Educational Services

Most people who have studied for a test like the SAT or the GRE

own a book published by Barron's, if only because they bought one of their many test prep books. That is what Barron's Educational Services is best known for and the reason it was founded in 1939. However, in recent years they have expanded and they also publish a wide variety of other genres, including fiction. [Read our full review here.](#)

19. PYR

PYR is a science fiction and fantasy publisher. They are now an imprint of Prometheus Publishing. They have published a number of well known genre books and have good world wide distribution. Their Canadian distributor is Penguin. [Read our full review here.](#)

20. Kane Miller Publishing

Kane Miller is an award winning publisher of educational children's books. Their most famous book to date is the children's classic Everyone Poops by Minna Unchi. They have good distribution, their books are widely available at libraries, and they generally do an excellent job. [Read our full review.](#)

Glossary

Advance: An advance is a signing bonus that is paid to the author before the book is published. It is paid against future royalty earnings. So, for every dollar you receive in an advance, you have to earn a dollar from book sales before you receive any additional royalty payments. Most independent publishers do not offer advances.

Anthology: A published collection of poems or other pieces writing, usually on a theme.

"Big Five": Previously known as "The Big Six," this term refers to: Penguin Random House, Macmillan, HarperCollins, Hachette and Simon & Schuster—the five largest publishers in North America. All of these publishers have multiple imprints. All of these publishers and most of their imprints require agents.

Chapbook: A 10-20 page collection of poetry, or less commonly fiction or creative non-fiction, by one author.

First Publication Rights: This term is most commonly used in the context of literary journals and magazines. Most publications will not publish work that has previously appeared in a different literary journal, print or online. Because of this most publishers require First Rights. These can also be called First North American Serial Rights or First Serial Rights. No matter what they are called, it usually means that you are giving that publications exclusive rights to publish your poem first. After they publish work the rights revert to you, sometimes right away, sometimes after six months. Many publishers of poetry and short story manuscripts want your work to have been previously published in literary journals.

Genre: A category of artistic composition, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Genre can refer to poetry, prose or non-fiction in terms of form. Or it can be a subject matter classification referring to science fiction, mysteries, or

various other established types of stories. If a literary journal or publisher says they are not interested in genre work they are using it as a subject matter classification.

Imprints: An imprint of a publisher is a trade name under which a work is published, many larger publishers use imprints as a way to market specific books. For example, science fiction books are usually published by a different imprint than mystery books, even if they are published by the same publisher.

Independent Publishers: A publisher that is not an imprint of the Big Five or a large media corporation. Independent Publishers can be small startups, or large established presses like Chronicle Books. Most do not require agents in order to submit.

Literary Agent: A literary agent is someone who represents writers and their written works to publishers and assists in the sale and deal negotiation of the same. Many publishers require authors to submit their work through a literary agent.

Literary Journal: A magazine that publishes primarily poetry, fiction, and/or creative nonfiction. Also, commonly referred to as journals or reviews.

Manuscript: An unpublished book length work of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry.

Reader: Used mostly in the context of larger journals and contests generally have volunteer readers, individuals who read a large chunk of the work submitted and who decide what part of that work they are going to pass on to the editors.

Reprints: Work that has been previously published elsewhere. This includes self-published work. Some publishers are particularly interested in publishing reprints as long as all the rights belong to the author. The majority of publishers only consider reprints of work that have been previously traditionally published.

Royalties: Royalties at their most basic refer to the amount of money an author earns off each copy of their book that is sold.

SASE (Self Addressed and Stamped Envelope): If you submit to a publisher, a contest, or a literary journal via the mail, then most publishers require that you include a SASE (Self Addressed and Stamped Envelope). This is so they can respond to your work with a rejection or acceptance letter.

Self-Publishing: When you publish your own work either directly on a platform like the Kindle or when you use a vanity press.

Solicited Submissions: Submissions from authors that the publisher's directly request. Most literary journals publish a mix of solicited and unsolicited submissions. Editors can solicit the work of friends or of famous or emerging writers. Most time when your work is solicited it is published.

Submission Manager: An online program that handles submissions electronically. The most common one is Submittable. Both literary journals and manuscript publishers use submission managers.

Traditional Publisher: A publisher who never charges you any fees, and who pays the author for their rights.

Unsolicited Submissions: The bulk of submissions to most journals are unsolicited. They are the submissions sent through submission managers, post, or emails to literary journals. If a manuscript publisher says they do not accept unsolicited submissions, then you cannot submit to them unless someone at the publisher has explicitly asked to see your work, or you have an agent who can submit your work for you.

Vanity Publisher/ Press: Also known as assisted publishing. Any publisher that charges you in order to publish your work is a vanity publisher.

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About the Author

Emily Harstone is the pen name of an author whose work has been published internationally by a number of respected journals. She is a professional submissions adviser. You can follow her on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/emilyharstone/>

Further Reading

[The Six Month Novel Writing Plan](#)

[The 2018 Guide to Manuscript Publishers](#)

[Authors Publish Magazine](#)